



Strawberry Amuse Bouche with Balsamic Caviar



Jim – 4 Guys and a Tomato

Event: Bainbridge Island Spouses and Guests, August 17, 2019

Okay, this is one of those show-off dishes. Let's do a molecular gastronomy palate pleaser – but what? Balsamic vinegar spherification impresses. Strawberries are at the end of their season, and I found some nice local ones that are red throughout, not the ones meant for easy transportation that have a white center. Combine that with soft ripe goat cheese and fresh mint from my garden, and I think I have a nice pretentious amuse bouche. If you are lucky to have a wild strawberry plants in your yard (thanks to the local birds), garnish with a one of the tiny, sweet berries.



Tip: Assemble right before serving; don't let the strawberries macerate or the cheese warm and melt.

Ingredients:

- Diced strawberries
- Diced soft goat cheese without the rind
- Balsamic pearls (recipe follows)
- Fine chiffonade of mint
- Fleur de Sel de Camargue, or Maldon sea salt flakes



Directions:

Dice the strawberries to about 3/8 inches. Cube the goat cheese to about 1/4 inches. Chiffonade the mint as finely as you can. Combine at a ratio of approximately 4:2:1, or to your taste. Mound the mixture onto tasting spoons. Sprinkle a few grains of sea salt. Liberally arrange the balsamic pearls on top.



Balsamic Vinegar Pearls

You can buy these pearls online in jars like caviar, but why do this recipe if you aren't going to put on a show in the kitchen? They're made by dissolving Agar Agar powder, which is made from seaweed, in boiled balsamic vinegar at a ratio of about of 1.5% by weight agar agar to vinegar, and then allowing drops of the cooled liquid to fall through a tall container of chilled oil. The process is called cold oil spherification. Find Agar Agar at most asian markets or online. Note, some packages have sugar mixed in, so you will have to increase the amount of powder. Ordinary cooking oil is okay, as you will rinse it off of the pearls. Use the best balsamic you have.

Ingredients:

- 100 g (~ half cup) aged balsamic vinegar
- 1.5 g (~ teaspoon) Agar Agar

Directions:

Add the Agar Agar to the balsamic vinegar and boil until the Agar Agar fully dissolves (2-3 minutes). Let the mixture cool to approximately 120°F.

Fill a tall container such as a drinking glass with oil and place it in the freezer for at least 30 minutes.

Using a syringe, eye dropper, squeeze bottle, or similar device, expel the mixture into the oil drop by drop.

I recommend you wait until the oil drops to below 25°F, the colder the oil the better, especially if you want to make a lot of pearls because the oil will warm as you work. If the pearls do not reach a temperature of around 95°F before they reach the bottom of the oil, they will not form round spheres.

Strain the oil into another container and rinse the pearls in a bowl of cold water. The oil will float to the top.

